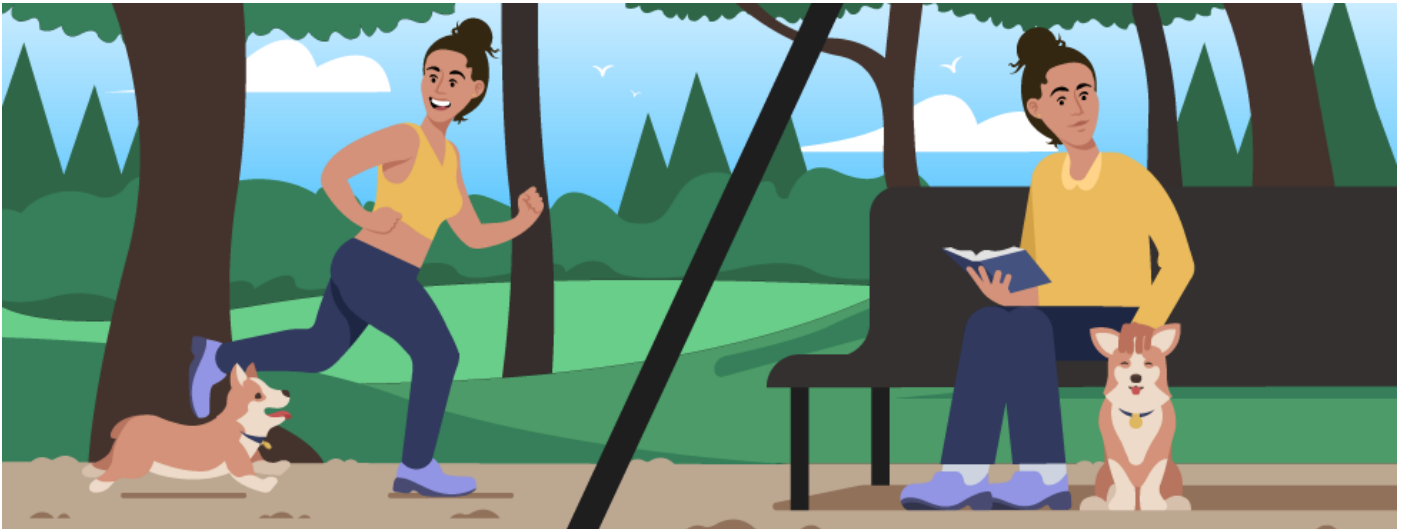


Building Personal Resilience in Twelve Steps

Step 8: Pace Your Efforts



“One step each week. You will be amazed at the difference it will make”

Making Time to Rest

Do you see yourself as an athlete? This may seem an unlikely question but our focus this week is about pacing your efforts to build your personal resilience as a life-skill and to sustain your performance and your wellbeing.

This is about more than building physical resilience, important as that is. We respond a little better to the idea of pacing ourselves if we have a tough physical task ahead of us, but we should also pace ourselves when faced with mentally or emotionally demanding challenges. Sometimes we need all three in top form all at the same time.

Think about these three examples:

- Facing a difficult meeting at work about an important new development which also involves working with some rather demanding colleagues. It may drain us by the end of the day both mentally and emotionally. We may feel physically shattered as well.
- Attending a family event where emotions will run high and potential conflicts need to be resolved. Emotionally this will be demanding, and we are sleeping badly with the worry of it all.
- Having a difficult month ahead at work where a number of staff will be away, and you will have to do more work as a result. It's likely to be a full-on working week. Physically it will be tiring, but it's also likely to take it out of us mentally as well. A possible consequence may be strained relationships at home, and therefore everyone may be more than a little stressed.

How can we prepare for these known challenges to our physical, mental or emotional strength? We may think about it a little but in all probability that is all we will do.

After the event it's not very likely that we shall think about a period of recuperation or rest. More than likely we shall keep going and wait for the next challenge with grim determination. We put our wellbeing

at risk and literally wear ourselves out. Inevitably over time this takes a toll on our physical, mental and emotional resilience and health.

Good athletes prepare physically, emotionally, mentally for the big events. They plan with a degree of precision to ensure they are in peak condition at precisely the right time. Moreover, they know the importance of downtime after major exertion and make rest and recuperation an equally important aspect of their training regime.

Perhaps most striking of all, athletes spend 90% or more of their time training and preparing for what might well be just 10% of their time or less, 'performing'. Yet for many of us, especially in the modern world of work, we are being asked for "high performance" for virtually 100% of our working hours. It is simply not sustainable to peak perform all day every day; we have to learn to pace our efforts.

Why, I wonder, do we not use the athlete's approach more often in our own working lives or even our family and social lives? Adrenaline rushes can help us manage crises and meet deadlines and a certain amount of pressure is invigorating and can bring out the best in us. But we can only sustain optimum levels of performance when we are feeling relaxed, secure and confident - not fearful, frantic and exhausted. We can control neither the past nor the future, but we can change our thinking and our behaviour.

This week our focus will be on how we can prepare for challenging times and how we can also build in quality time for rest and recuperation.

Try each of the following as a forward plan to build your physical, mental and emotional reserves in preparation for the challenges ahead:

Focus on a key event that lies ahead. This could be an important meeting at work, a family event, or a period when you are going to be very busy and stretched. Write down why the event is important, what the implications of it are if it goes well or what they would be if it went badly. *Begin to focus on that event as part of a conscious planning exercise making appropriate time and space to give it your full attention.*

Identify the particular resilience challenges. Look at the event from all angles. Does the event present any physical challenges? (Time, energy, physical strength). What emotional demands do you think it might make? (Conflicts, difficult messages to share, anticipated emotional responses). Will it be mentally taxing in some way? (Complexity, demanding issue). *List the demands the event may make on you from all these aspects.*

Work through your list to plan your approach. For example, what can you do to ensure you are physically rested before taking up the challenge? What might you do to prepare for that complicated meeting? How might you head off some of the emotional stress of a difficult conversation you know you have ahead? You are the best judge of what you need to do, and of course there are no perfect solutions, so giving yourself time and space to plan and think will help you determine your course of action. *For each of the demands on your physical, mental, emotional resilience you have listed, write down the actions you can take to prepare effectively.*

Call on others to assist. Who can you talk to about things before the event? Is there someone whose advice you would value? Could you rehearse the situation with a friend or colleague beforehand? Do you need to prepare others for what is ahead and gain their support? Building resilience is not about "going it alone". *Identify those around you who can help you to prepare and support you through.*

Plan before the event how you will rest and recuperate afterwards. It may be as simple as having quiet and calm time alone, or it may be to meet up with a friend, a long walk, yoga and meditation. What matters is identifying what works for you and what you can look forward to doing that you know will restore your resilience.

Plan after the event what you are going to do to give yourself time to recover.

Unfortunately, we do not always know what challenges we shall need to face. The unexpected by very nature takes us unaware and at such time we must draw on our reserves at very short notice. But there are many occasions when, like the athlete, we can and should prepare for significant events and plan our recovery time. So perhaps you should think of yourself as a finely tuned athlete after all?

One step each week. You will be amazed at the difference it will make.

Jayne Carrington

Director of Wellbeing

Next Week Step 9: Sleep Well